

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/05/25 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100160053-1

Approved For Release 2006/05/25 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100160053-1

CIA/OCI/IM 1754/73

OCI No. 1754/73  
3 December 1973

MEMORANDUM

VENEZUELA: Elections '73

Approximately 4.6 million voters will go to the polls on 9 December to elect a president, congress, state legislatures and municipal councils.

- . . . .Over 700,000 new voters have registered this year; a majority of the 11 million population is under 20 years of age.

Of the thirteen presidential candidates only two, Democratic Action's Carlos Andres Perez and the governing Social Christian party's Lorenzo Fernandez, have any chance of winning.

- . . . .Recent public opinion polls indicate that the race is too close to call, with only a few percentage points separating the two. However, almost a fifth of the voters remain undecided.
- . . . .The winner will head a minority government and forming alliances in the new congress will be his big headache.

25X1

S E C R E T

The president is elected for a five-year term by a direct vote of the electorate; a plurality wins. The Congress, on the other hand, is elected by the d'Hondt system of proportional representation employing the "highest average" rule used in many Western European countries.

Domestic issues have largely dominated the campaign. Polls have shown the electorate has little interest in foreign policy.

As a result, COPEI, the governing Social Christian party, has abandoned its efforts to capitalize on the Caldera government's foreign policy achievements and its domestic pacification program. It recently began concentrating on local issues. The government has inaugurated a wide range of industrial and public works projects to appeal to the poor and give a boost to Fernandez. The opposition Democratic Action Party has all along attacked the government on bread-and-butter issues: inflation, spiraling cost of living, and severe shortages in basic commodities. Thus far, attacks on foreign investment--largely represented by US oil companies--have been muted. In fact, major candidates as well as party elders have attempted to curb excessive campaign rhetoric on this issue.

#### The Potential Problems

Most important in terms of political stability will be the size of the combined vote obtained by the two major parties.

- . . . Both parties predict a "polarization" between them, with the smaller parties to the left and right receiving a smaller share of the votes than in 1968.
- . . . The smaller parties on the other hand expect the election to show

S E C R E T

a "polarization" between the "establishment" parties--COPEI and AD--and the "anti-establishment" parties prominently represented by the new marxist Movement to Socialism and the rightist Perezjimenista Movement.

- . . . .Indeed, if the trend in election results since 1958 holds true, AD and COPEI will garner less than the 49.7 percent of the vote they polled in 1968, which would create an unstable political situation. Main beneficiaries would be the anti-establishment parties of the left and right.
- . . . .A larger than usual proportion of null votes and abstentions would also demonstrate a lack of confidence by the electorate in the present party system.
- . . . .Unless the two major parties together can dominate the legislature, Venezuela will be in for serious difficulties.

There are signs that the "polarization" claimed by AD and COPEI may be an accurate reflection of the present political situation. Several factors account for this.

- . . . .The conviction among Venezuelan voters that this election will be a "watershed" for the country's political and economic future is expected to cause many to decide not to "waste their votes" by backing lost causes or candidates with no chance of winning.
- . . . .The once highly touted New Force leftist coalition is proving lackluster on the hustings; some for-

S E C R E T

mer backers of its dominant party--the People's Electoral Movement (MEP)--are drifting back to AD or turning to MAS.

- . . . .Former dictator Perez Jimenez's refusal to endorse a surrogate candidate and his request that his followers abstain from voting for president has further fragmented a movement that received almost 11 percent of the vote in 1968. It had attracted the support of 20 percent of the electorate this year.

The first few days after the election and while the votes are counted may be the critical period.

- . . . .Both parties fear that if either wins by a close margin--perhaps 50,000 votes--the other would be very likely to cry fraud and conspire with their military supporters to overturn the election results.
- . . . .Such a situation could result in serious disturbances by party militants who already are building themselves up to a frenzy with rallies and parades.
- . . . .A narrow victory could cause months of instability. Reports of military plotting would intensify.
- . . . .Party leaders are continuing to lobby with the military to ensure that it will remain impartial if it is called on to keep order or ratify the election results.

25X1

S E C R E T

### The Principal Candidates

If Fernandez wins, he will need alliances with other groups to pass legislation.

- . . . .Deep divisions in the past within the Democratic Action party over the issue of collaboration with COPEI and the deep conservatism of Perez will make it difficult to accept COPEI's offer of an alliance.
- . . . .COPEI may seek temporary deals with the left--possibly MAS and the New Force--and small rightist parties.
- . . . .MAS and other leftists, however, would exact quid-pro-quos for their cooperation. This could include new punitive legislation against the oil companies and recognition of Cuba and China.
- . . . .COPEI's flexibility in dealing with the left will depend on the attitude of the military. Armed forces leaders are concerned over leftist tendencies in the present government and are opposed to any formal COPEI alliance with MAS in the new Congress.

If Carlos Andres Perez wins, the post-electoral situation is likely to be more stable. The military and the upper classes probably prefer him to Fernandez.

- . . . .Moderate COPEI leaders would probably urge cooperation with AD. Such cooperation would meet with a strong disapproval from leftist elements within COPEI, and could bring about a split within the party.

S E C R E T

~~SECRET~~

. . . .In addition, the left in general would feel outrage and would probably begin an intensive campaign of opposition. This could also include reviving the insurgency movements that plagued AD governments in the 1960s.

25X1

~~SECRET~~